

CLAIMS

1. A method of enabling voice control of voice-controlled apparatus, involving:

- 5 (a) detecting when the user is touching at least a predetermined portion of the apparatus;
 (b) initially enabling the apparatus for voice control only when the user is detected in (a) as touching the apparatus.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus only remains enabled for voice
 10 control whilst the user continues to be detected in (a) as touching the apparatus.

3. A method according to claim 1, further involving:

- detecting when the user is speaking, and
 - where the user is detected as speaking whilst the apparatus is initially enabled for voice
 15 control, continuing enablement of the apparatus for voice control following the user ceasing to touch the apparatus but only whilst the user continues speaking and for a timeout period thereafter, recommencement of speaking by the user during this timeout period continuing enablement of voice control with timing of the timeout period being reset.

20 4. A method according to claim 1, wherein (a) requires the user to touch an activation area of the apparatus comprising one or more zones which together occupy a substantial part of the upper part of the apparatus.

25 5. A method according to claim 4, wherein said substantial part is at least the area of a hand.

6. A method according to claim 4, wherein said activation area comprises one or more of the following zones intended for hand contact:

- 30 - a zone along a top front edge of the apparatus;
 - a zone along a top side edge of the apparatus;
 - a zone occupying a major part of the front third of the top of the apparatus.

7. A method according to claim 1, wherein (a) requires a touch with at least one predetermined non-personal characteristic.

5 8. A method according to claim 7, wherein said at least one predetermined characteristic is a minimum touch pressure in a particular direction.

9. A method according to claim 8, wherein said touch is detected using a switch plate mechanically configured to resist accidental activation by a user passing by the apparatus
10 rather than approaching towards the apparatus.

10. A method according to claim 1, wherein (a) involves the user stroking a particular zone of the apparatus.

15 11. Apparatus provided with a voice-control user interface comprising:
- a speech recognition subsystem for recognising user voice commands for controlling the apparatus;
- a touch sensor for detecting when the user is touching at least a predetermined portion of the apparatus; and
20 - enablement control means for initially enabling the apparatus for voice control only if the touch sensor detects that the user is touching the apparatus.

12. Apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the control means is operative to keep the apparatus enabled for voice control only whilst the touch sensor continues to detect the
25 user touching the apparatus.

13. Apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising a speaking detector for detecting when a user is speaking, the control means comprising:
- initial-enablement means for effecting the said initial enabling of the apparatus for
30 voice control;
- delayed-disablement means including timing means for timing a timeout period; and

- means for activating the delayed- disablement means upon the speaking detector detecting a user speaking whilst the apparatus is initially enabled by the initial-enablement means;

the delayed-disablement means, when activated, being operative to keep the apparatus
 5 enabled for voice control following the touch sensor ceasing to detect that the user is touching the apparatus but only whilst the speaking detector continues to detect that the user is speaking and for the duration thereafter of the said timeout period as timed by the timing means, the delayed-disablement means being responsive to the speaking detector detecting recommencement of speaking by the user during this timeout period to reset
 10 timing of the timeout period.

14. Apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the touch sensor is arranged to detect a user touching one or more zones of the external surface of the apparatus which together occupy a substantial part of the upper part of the apparatus.

15 15. Apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said substantial part is at least the area of a hand.

16. Apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said one or more zones comprise one or
 20 more of the following zones intended for hand contact:

- a zone along a top front edge of the apparatus;
- a zone along a top side edge of the apparatus;
- a zone occupying a major part of the front third of the top of the apparatus.

25 17. Apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the touch sensor is arranged to only register a touch having at least one predetermined non-personal characteristic.

18. Apparatus according to claim 17, wherein said at least one predetermined characteristic is a minimum touch pressure in a particular direction.

19. Apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the touch sensor comprises a switch plate mechanically configured to resist accidental activation by a user passing by the apparatus rather than approaching towards the apparatus.